

TOWN OF MANSFIELD/DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, October 17, 2007
Audrey Beck Municipal Building
Council Chambers

Minutes

Members Present: A. Barberet, R. Blicher, E. Higgins, C. Paulhus, R. Pellegrine, W. Stauder (Chair), W. Solenski

Members Absent: G. Cole, R. Gergler, C. Lary, V. Stearns, S. Thomas

Staff: Matt Streeter (Town of Mansfield), Captain Chris Corey (DOC), Counselor Supervisor Joseph Roach (DOC).

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting came to order at 3:10 p.m. Chairwoman Stauder informed committee that Matt Streeter, an intern in the Town Manager's Office, would be taking the minutes for today's meeting. Chairwoman Stauder opened with comments that she has been following the current events through newspapers and watching the judicial hearings on CTV. She also expressed concerns over potential numbers.

II. MINUTES

1. July 17, 2007 Meeting Minutes –Chairman Stauder noted a correction in the opening page 3 of the minutes: there were two (2) instances of the term “N Y I,” this should be “M Y I” as acronym for Manson Youth Institution, the level 4 DOC facility in Cheshire for inmates under the age of 21. Warden Higgins made a motion, approve the minutes of July 17, 2007. Mr. Paulhus seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

III. COMMUNICATIONS

1. August 20, 2007 List of Offenses at DBCI – No discussion from the Committee.
2. September 14, 2007 List of Offenses at DBCI – Warden Higgins distributed an updated list of offenses dated October 17, 2007. Lt. Solenski asked if any youth inmates aged 16-18 currently at DBCI. Warden Higgins answered no. Lt. Solenski Inquired to the public act by which the state was trying to propose regarding offenders under eighteen years old. Warden Higgins replied they will be

treated as juvenile in 2010. Discussion continued that the State was one of the last to lower the age. Warden Higgins that there remains a question over whose agency will have jurisdiction once changes are made. The public act reveals no determination or stipulation as to who will oversee juveniles. Lt. Solenski inferred that this "will change everything."

Chairwoman Stauder asked how DBCI was doing getting those who have been released to halfway houses with the recent policy changes. Warden Higgins admitted there are community factions who have concerns. They have been reassessing those who are out, and the whole process has been slowing down. They have been moving those inmates who are inappropriate for DBCI back to proper facilities.

Lt. Solenski asked if this had to do with the Cheshire situation. Warden Higgins: yes. Lt. Solenski continued if there has been any determination as to those with similar offenses as Cheshire. Warden Higgins answered there has been, that burglaries are now being looked at differently. There is usually a connection between drugs, burglaries and larcenies. Though not like Cheshire, most are not as serious. The differentiation between burglary 3rd and what happened in Cheshire does make it more difficult in getting them out (delay in getting to a halfway house).

Chairwoman Stauder asked how it has affected you. Warden Higgins replied "We haven't changed." She and her staff have talked with the inmates and they understand the situation. They (inmates) understand they put themselves in their current circumstances.

Chairwoman Stauder asked, "Do we need to build more prisons?" Warden Higgins replied she did not know, but stated that it is very costly to incarcerate individuals. Chairwoman Stauder asked, "Do we have a high incarceration rate?" Warden Higgins replied she could not tell an answer to that, but inferred that she did not think it to be abnormally high. Chairwoman Stauder followed with the question, "What is our count?" Warden Higgins answered, "962 + 120, this is the standard and it's been constant for some time now. Really, no change."

IV. WARDEN'S REPORT AND DISCUSSION

Ms. Higgins stated that she already talked about changes occurring at DBCI such as who can be moved out, appropriateness vs. not appropriate being moved right out. She reported that the razor wire fence funding was approved. They have replaced aging generators

and are keeping up with maintenance. There have update security doors within units. Replaced chiller for cooling units. The basketball and volleyball courts are finished. The greenhouse is up and nearly fully operational.

Warden Higgins continued that programming remained the same. The outreach program has had inmates speak to groups. One such example being a visit to the 'Hole in the Wall Gang' in Ashford. Inmates spoke to approximately 170 7th & 8th grade students. Lt. Solenski added that it seemed to be mutually beneficial to both the prisoners and the kids. Chairwoman Stauder asked the warden if the prisoners were still going out to baseball fields. Ms. Higgins replied that it has quieted down due to the season and that it usually occurs in the spring to summer.

Major Blicher asked what has changed to the list of offenses in the past few weeks. Warden Higgins informed the committee that eligibility parole dates had been revoked. Someone who may have been moved to DBCI in anticipation of release may not be close to discharge.

Mr. Pellegrine, referring to the list of offenses, stated that his consideration of high risk maybe different from others but those certain offenses...especially assault on police officers...should not be considered low risk. The chair interjected that they may be near the end of their term. Mr. Pellegrine stated that while he realized that and that there may be a scale, certain offenses should never be assigned to a low risk facility regardless of scenario. Major Blicher stated it's a sad commentary on society and he appreciated Mr. Pellegrine's thoughts. He continued that levels of disrespect have increased from a point thirty years ago which you may encounter one or two assaults on a law enforcer per year to now where it is very prevalent. Lt. Solenski echoed Major Blicher's appreciation to Mr. Pellegrine. He added that there is a general "lack of respect for all authority figures...cops, teachers, parents, etc. It is the way society is now." Warden Higgins responded that when you read the reports on a daily basis, it is unpleasant reading. Replying to earlier comments, Ms. Higgins mentioned that it is tough to drop any offender from higher security to reentry into society. The purpose of lowering to a low risk facility helps to reintegrate into society...the more normalized the better off the inmate is. They do have to earn it as well as a certain amount of good behavior. Of the two murderers on the list, one is at the end of nineteen year sentence with three months to go. She did not know the circumstances of the second inmate serving a sentence for murder conviction. She stated the importance of coming up with

ideas of easing the prisoners whom are paroled into the community and that it is an experiment of what is going to work. She offered words of encouragement "do the best you can do."

Ms. Barberet mentioned that Commissioner Vance was asked by the legislature regarding accommodation. Ms. Higgins replied we accommodate whoever the court sends. Maj. Blicher asked if Connecticut is sending inmates out of state, Ms. Higgins: no. Lt. Solenski asked if state is in compliance with federal laws. Ms. Higgins: yes. Chairwoman Stauder asked if take any inmates with mental illness. Ms. Higgins: no.

V. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chairwoman Stauder again mentioned she has been watching CTV and reading the paper and commented that it must be tough for you guys right now (referring to Ms. Higgins and Mr. Roach).

VI. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC TO SPEAK

There was no one from the public who wished to address the committee at this meeting.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

Setting the meeting schedule for 2008- Discussion originated around whether the meetings being held at DBCI interrupts the warden's schedule. Warden Higgins responded they could meet more than once if the committee desired and that it would be 'ok' for staff as so long as the meeting time was 1 PM. Major Blicher mentioned that he preferred 3 PM meeting times and the present location (Council Chambers, Audrey P. Beck Municipal Building) for most meetings with a visit to the DBCI maybe once per year. This was agreed by several other committee members. Mr. Pellegrine suggested every once in a while when there is an innovation to see, it would be beneficial for the committee if they could take part in or observe such instance. Mr. Roach agreed. Capt. Corey added the possibility of a GED graduation ceremony. Chairwoman Stauder quipped that maybe the committee could visit when the new razor-wire is unveiled...on a spring day.

It was at this point that it was suggested that Ms. Capriola had made a suggestion that the committee members supply her office with e-mail addresses for communication purposes. Intern Streeter

passed around a sheet of paper to collect the e-mail addresses of those in attendance.

Retesting notification system- Chairwoman Stauder asked if it was time again already to do this. She also asked when the last test was. Mr. Paulhus believed it to be last fall (a year ago). Warden Higgins reiterated that it doesn't seem like it was that long ago, but the test could be done anytime which the committee wanted. Chairman Stauder, referring to the first letter to residents (attached to agenda) seemed complicated. She had concerns over the wordiness of the second paragraph and wondered if there was a way to simplify. Discussion ensued regarding corrections on the first line of the letter: correcting the spelling from Institute to Institution; deleting 'formerly Northeast Correctional Institute;' and adding 'located on Route 44 Middle Turnpike.' Discussion continued as to why the contact was the Mansfield Police Department. Chairwoman Stauder asked Intern Streeter to ask Maria Capriola why the letter refers the residents to notify the police.

Major Blicher suggested checking with Maria (Capriola) regarding the specific wording of the letter, though he did agree to corrections in the first line.

Upon review of the second letter, it was noted that the first line in this letter was pretty much what the committee liked to see in the first letter, however removing 'formerly Northeastern Correctional Institution' and adding street number 251 before Middle Turnpike. Discussion again began regarding the notification of the police department and who the contact e-mail was. Intern Streeter suggested that it may be possible that the police department is coordinating the contact list of residents requesting notification. He pointed out that the contact e-mail most likely was Audrey Conrad of the Mansfield Police Department whom is CC'd on both letters. Discussion continued that once the list is compiled, in the event of a test those who live closer to DBCI will be called first and then branch out in radius to DBCI.

Additional New Business - Major Blicher brought to the committee's attention an update with regards to UConn's Emergency Notification system. He felt committee would like to be advised. UConn recently installed a new siren and public address system on both the main Storrs campus as well as the Depot campus. The new system would be used to inform the university community regarding emergencies such as related to dangerous weather, hazardous materials or threats to security (i.e. bomb scare or an

armed "shooter"). Major Blicher continued that this system will be tested in the near future and may be heard outside of UConn. The University Communications Office will be notifying the community prior to testing. In the event of a test or an actual emergency, the system would emit a high pitch tone or wail for approximately ten seconds. This would be followed by a public announcement that is either pre-recorded or a live voice. The test is pre-recorded.

As background information, Major Blicher explained how the university administration was interested in various methods of emergency notification, especially in reaction to the Virginia Tech campus shooting this past May. UConn tested its old Cold War era siren. The antiquated system, which had been all but abandoned (except for bees), had no PA capabilities and was not considered a viable alternative.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Major Blicher made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Paulhus. The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Streeter
Graduate Assistant
Office of the Town Manager